



Support. Education. Local Events.
for Adoptive Families



Helping Children Understand and Cope

When children or youth spend extended periods in out-of-home care, memories of significant events and people can be lost. Children may lose their sense of self: who they are, where they have lived, the people they have lived with, where they went to school, memories of favorite items (e.g., stuffed animals, blankets), and more. You can help your child review and understand previous life experiences to clarify what happened in the past, and help integrate those experiences so your child will have greater self-understanding.

Acknowledging the past

The following questions may help your child frame past experiences and address current circumstances:

- Who am I? (exploring identity)
- What happened to me? (exploring issues of loss and/or trauma)
- Where am I going? (new relationships)
- How will I get there? (questions related to relationships)
- When will I know I belong? (connection and safety)

You can help your child answer these questions and understand his or her unique history and current situation. Just because children don't bring up the past doesn't mean they aren't interested or aren't still affected by their experiences.

Pay attention to your child's nonverbal cues. If he or she seems quiet and withdrawn, consider what might be going on. You might want to ask if your child is thinking about or missing his or her biological or former foster parents or siblings. Regardless of the answer, this will be a signal to your child that you are willing to explore those feelings.

While it may be difficult to understand the past trauma and losses your child or youth encountered before adoption, all adopted children and youth experience some level of loss when separated from their family of origin. Even if the child has lived in your home for some time and the adoption process has been positive, the finality of the adoption may intensify feelings of loss. Children in foster care often have traumatic histories that affect them in ways that may be difficult for them to put into words and may make it harder for them to form trusting relationships with new family members. Your child may experience a feeling of loss from changes in language, culture, religion, or a separation from his or her siblings. Some of the feelings of loss and grief may be vague—e.g., children know their birth parents and siblings still exist, but have no

"The past does not define me, it ignites me. The past is not a piece of me, it has placed me."

—Ricky Maye

control over access to them. It is important to be sensitive to how these feelings can affect your child. Minimizing them may result in unresolved grief.

If your child has a different racial or cultural identity than you, be aware that a colorblind approach to parenting can limit your child's potential to develop and own their full identity. Experts emphasize the importance of honoring and celebrating your child's racial and cultural heritage. When there is no discussion regarding racial or cultural differences, your child may get the message that conversations around race are off-limits, leading to potential feelings of shame or confusion—and leaving your child to confront his or her reality alone.

This is an edited excerpt from "Helping your child transition from foster care to adoption," Factsheet for Families, (July 2018), Child Welfare Information Gateway. Complete article including source citations can be found at the website (childwelfare.gov).



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Check out our website (postadoptionrc.org) for past editions of our newsletter, events, helpful articles, and more information about us and services we offer.

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2

Bethany Christian Services
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REGION 3

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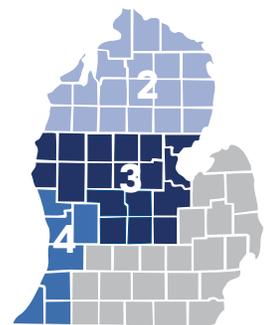
REGION 4

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Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Van Buren counties



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